

Guitarist Breakstone takes a step back in jazz time

By J.M. Baról

JBAROL@ABQTRIB.COM / 823-3612

In a time when jazz artists are moving from the straightahead style to more contemporary expression, Joshua Breakstone, a New York-based jazz guitarist, is proving traditional is still hip with his single-note melody lines, rich tone and driving feel.

Labeled as a bebop and swing jazz guitarist by critics, Breakstone has chosen to step away from the contemporary trend and back to the influence of such '50s and '60s notables as Charlie Parker, Clifford Brown and Barry Harris.

Straightahead jazz has suffered in the United States, Breakstone says, because of the media's concentration on contemporary jazz.

This is not the case in Europe and Asia, he says, where traditional jazz, or *hard-bop*, as it is called there, is widespread.

Breakstone has become a popular jazz name in Japan, where he tours twice a year.

Throughout his 13 albums, Breakstone has blended original compositions with jazz standards and show songs.

In his most recent release, "This Just In," Breakstone dabbles in improvisation



In a world of trendiness, jazz guitarist Joshua Breakstone looks to tradition.

Sinatra, Gillespie and bossa nova classics with grit and style, then inserts some of his own originals to finish off a crisp, succinct foot-tapping triumph.

Breakstone first picked up the guitar — his sister's Martin acoustic — at the impressionable age of 16. Inspired by late greats such as Frank Zappa and Jimmy Hendrix, he began his education as a rock player. After a

year of playing rock, however, he moved into jazz.

"I never made a solid decision about making jazz guitar a profession," he says. "It just kind of happened, and I guess I've been very fortunate all along."

Breakstone earned his music degrees at New College in Sarasota, Fla., Berdee College in Boston and New York University. He taught non-classical guitar and jazz studies at Rhode Island Conservatory of Music during the early '80s.

He has collaborated with such classic musicians as Pepper Adams, Kenny Barron, Tommy Flanagan, Barry Harris, Jimmy Knepper and Jack McDuff.

Breakstone doesn't depend on pickups, amps or effects to get the sound he wants.

"I can get the sound that I need because it's in my hands," he says.

That sound has earned him praise in the jazz world and has made him revered as one of the best of the jazz guitarists because of his faith in traditional jazz guitar.

He describes his style as "jazz and,

JOSHUA BREAKSTONE

Wednesday: Espiritu, 7:30 p.m., 731 Canyon Road, Santa Fe. Tickets \$10. Call 820-2226.

Thursday: Outpost Performance Space, 8 p.m., 112 Morningside Dr. S.E. Tickets \$8 Call 268-0044.

in a certain sense, sort of a highlight of traditional jazz features, including swing and improv."

At least, that's what the critics call it. The labels don't matter to him, he says.

"I just try and play music that is beautiful and means something," he says.

Breakstone's hard-driving, single-note style corresponds to his belief that jazz guitarists should not worry so much about speed but rather their ability to express themselves through the music.

"I'm still moving in the direction of trying to produce strong melodies that communicate," he says. "Simply put, I think one needs to develop the techniques to be able to say what one needs to."